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AF FOR A/S KANSTEINER AND PDAS SNYDER

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SUBJECT: FUTURE STRATEGIES FOR MASS ACTION IN ZIMBABWE

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY THE R.E. Whitehead DUE TO 1.5 (b)

11. (C) Summary: Experience gained from last June's &Final Push8 attempt at mass action has altered the strategic vision for those promoting and organizing non-violent protest in Zimbabwe. An accurate assessment of the situation and temperament of the Zimbabwean population points away from a &Serbian style8 mass uprising that aims at the immediate downfall of the ZANU (PF) regime. More realistically, civil society and the MDC have concluded that they must plan for a longer-term struggle that engages and empowers the population to undertake a lower intensity but sustained campaign of peaceful protest, defiance, and non-cooperation to demonstrate the regime's lack of popular support and thereby encourage negotiations and democratic reforms. As in the cases of organized political resistance movements in other countries, a successful mass action campaign in Zimbabwe will require long-term strategic planning, widespread grassroots training in non-violent action, and a phased approach of low-risk, confidence building actions leading gradually to larger and stronger acts of political defiance. A hasty campaign of mass action risks failure and is not the best course of action at this time. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Non-violent resistance has been embraced by most proponents of democratic reform in Zimbabwe as the best strategy for influencing the course of a political transition and for preparing Zimbabweans to defend themselves against future state oppression. The opposition party, trade unions, and civil society organizations have over the last six months employed many mass action tactics, including marches, strikes, and a street art campaign. Except for the MDC and ZCTU-called strikes that were widely observed across the country, the mass actions to date have been relatively small, localized, and focused on selective political issues, such as the protests organized around the international cricket matches in Bulawayo, the Mother's Day march organized by Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), and the religious services for victims of human rights held by Archbishop Pius Ncube. cc).

13. (SBU ) The MDC-led &Final Push8 campaign in June, 2003 attempted unsuccessfully to escalate this nascent but growing pattern of selective resistance to a mass movement of popular political defiance that would challenge the authority of the GOZ. The nationwide strike, the passive aspect of the mass action, was an overwhelming success with as much as 90% of businesses closed in major urban areas during the course of the week. However, the disappointing turnout for the planned street marches illustrated definitively that the population was not yet prepared to suddenly undertake high-risk activist behavior in defiance of the regime. Subsequent analyses of the &Final Push8 by the MDC and civil society observers concluded that more groundwork would be required for such ambitious action to succeed. Experience in other countries has conclusively shown that political defiance against a violent regime requires careful planning and preparation. First and foremost, prospective participants must understand what is expected of them; they must have enough successful experience with non-violent mass action that fear is lessened or controlled; and they must have well-trained, disciplined street-level organizations and leadership to guide them. These pre-requisites for successful mass protest are all in the early stages of development in Zimbabwe.

14. (C) Zimbabwe does not have a history of non-violent political mobilization or widespread civic participation and organization. The few times that specific grievances have resulted in spontaneous street action, such as the July 1960 protests against the Whitehead government or the 1998 food riots, the population has been violently suppressed. Many older Zimbabweans also too clearly remember the brutal methods which both the UDI Government and liberation forces used against those whose political allegiance was suspect. Political violence over the last three years has reaffirmed the ruthlessness of the government in the minds of the people. Such liberal use of force has created a climate of fear and powerlessness among all sectors of society that must be overcome before a successful nation-wide resistance campaign can be effectively launched. As a major complicating factor, the organizational structures of society

do not reach very deep. Even the unions have historically neglected to organize and empower their members at the level of the shop floor. The Rhodesian government and the Zanu (PF) regime both discouraged independent social groupings and institutions. Civil society organizations in general are consequently relatively new, weak, and focused on advocacy rather than activism. Thus, people at the grassroots have very little experience of and very little institutional support for organizing collective action.

15. (C) Bridging the gap between fear and action will require a civic education campaign designed specifically to spread the idea of non-violent action and to impart skills of community organizing. Several civic groups as well as the MDC expect to focus their efforts on this critical training process over the coming months in hopes of producing a core of disciplined and committed non-violent activists and community organizations capable of defending their political space and constitutional rights. In recognition of the need for very basic capacity building, the goals of such training have been broadened from narrow partisan organizing to general community empowerment. In addition to a focus on strengthening geographical communities, it is also envisioned that existing organizations, such as student groups, local church groups, and unions will be targeted for more systemic training and organizational strengthening. In keeping with this new strategic focus, public calls for mass action will most likely decline in the near term although small, limited actions will continue. Low-risk, community-based activities such as street-art and graffiti messages, "resistance" music creation and dissemination, community "clean-up" campaigns, community meetings and small, localized marches are planned. Organizers hope that through such activities, communities will become more comfortable engaging the authorities and gain experience in organizing themselves for political actions and exercising their political rights.

16. (C) Coordination between the civics and the opposition party will likely impact the speed at which this plan for broad civic education and grassroots organizing can occur. Over the last few months, informal links have developed between the MDC mass action committee and civil society groups working on mass action strategies. Although there is some lingering mutual suspicion of one another's motives and disagreement over strategic focus and tactical approach, i.e. short-term vs. long-term objectives and top-down vs. bottom-up organizing, information sharing about activities and objectives has increased. Because the MDC suspects that civil society is organizing another political party and civil society believes that the MDC is only interested in co-opting them for partisan objectives and hijacking their scarce resources, it has been difficult for them to forge close links. After the "Final Push," civil society mass action organizers, who disagreed with such a quick escalation of mass action but supported the effort against their own better judgement, indicated that they will not support any similar actions in the near future. However, MDC's own experience with the "Final Push" finally convinced them of the need to move more slowly and deliberately. Thus, MDC and civil society are now moving along separate but parallel tracks that can be mutually supportive as long as information-sharing continues.

17. Comment: (C) Once the concept of non-violent strategies and community defense is grasped by a critical mass of people, time and experience will still be needed to increase the capacity and confidence of communities to act. As in other effective non-violent political struggles, a strategy of selective resistance comprising small, local actions must cumulatively grow into a resistance movement that encompasses more and more areas of society. The USG should support this more patient course of social transformation in Zimbabwe. While it may not be the immediate solution to the current political impasse in the country, it can gradually bring greater pressure to bear on the regime, channel discontent in positive directions and promote future democratic development. On the other hand basing U.S. expectations for change in Zimbabwe on a sweeping, organized or spontaneous near-term campaign of non-violent mass action is a dubious strategy.

SULLIVAN